

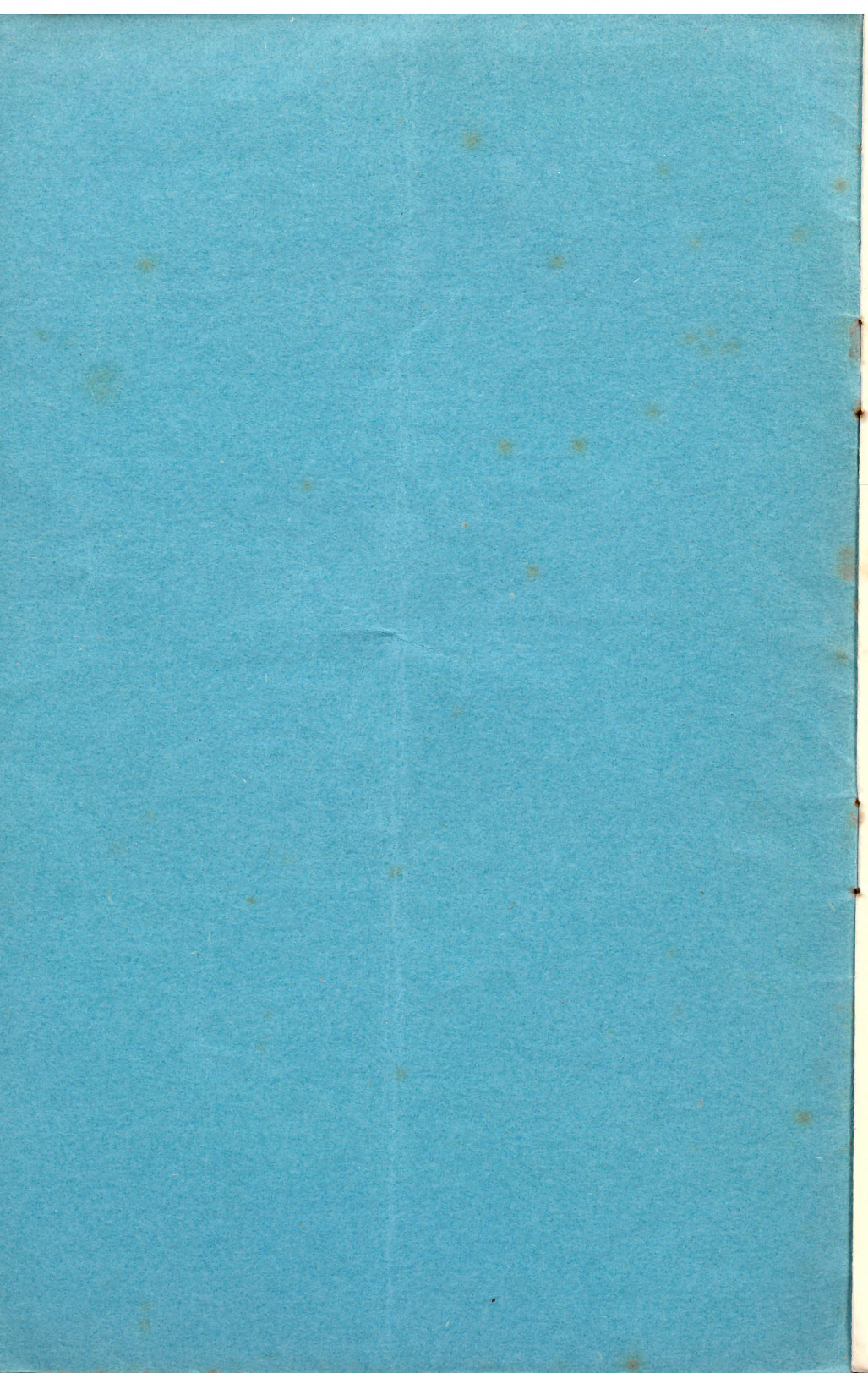
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I AM PERSUADED

A Methodist Statement
of the Christian Pacifist Case

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SIXPENCE



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A METHODIST STATEMENT OF THE CHRISTIAN PACIFIST CASE

INTRODUCTION

The Christian Pacifist case is rooted in a theological interpretation of the Cross and the practical obligation to act on that belief. It does not begin with an attempt to evaluate any given set of circumstances and to provide an answer to the problems they involve. Less does it arrogate to itself the total responsibility for the consequences of the actions which it regards as called for. Christian pacifism is a faith which demands obedience rather than a general attitude which needs restating and modifying in the light of contemporary events.

We who share it are satisfied that we can deploy sufficient arguments to make our case appear realistic to many who do not owe this allegiance to Jesus Christ but we also believe that the case does not stand or fall on our ability to commend it in the realm either of rational thought or practical politics. The faith of Christian pacifism is a faith in the power of God to achieve His purpose through human obedience to the Cross of Jesus Christ as the instrument of our salvation as well as the atonement for our sins.

MODERN WAR AND CHRISTIAN OBEDIENCE

The Christian pacifist believes that participation in war is incompatible with his obedience for the following reasons:—

(1) It is of the essence of war that it involves the killing of human beings. It is not to be identified with the mere use of force, for any physical action requires force of some kind, and force can be used in many ways that are entirely beneficent. It is not even to be confused with other uses of force against human beings; for we can use considerable force against (for example) a criminal and still

be able to reform him; but once we have killed a man we have destroyed our last chance of doing anything about him at all. It is not to be confused with sacrifice, for although in warfare some men may undertake actions which they know will lead to death, the general purpose of fighting is not to end one's existence, but to preserve it; if war were sacrifice, there might be martyrdoms, but there would be no battles. Above all, the principles of war are not to be confused with the principles of Christ's cross, for the purpose of an army is not to love and save its enemies, but to kill them; if that were not so, it would not be armed.

(2) There are certain other things which, although perhaps not of the essence of war, are to-day an inevitable part of it. The first is torture; for whether the fighters desire it or not, the result of using modern weapons is that people are tortured as well as killed. We are all horrified at the sufferings of those who went through Belsen and Buchenwald; but the physical sufferings of those who have gone through atomic bombing, obliteration bombing, and napalm bombing, have been no less terrible. We are not facing the facts if we do not remember figures like those described by Rene Cutforth, the B.B.C. correspondent in Korea, or by Takashi Nagai in Nagasaki, or others in Germany—figures with no eyes and with a black crust instead of a skin, standing all the time with legs apart; others crawling like lizards, making croaking, groaning sounds, with the skin torn off them and hanging in sheets, and with their bodies smashed where they have been thrown against something hard; and others that have been, quite simply, burnt alive. It is true that very few, if any, of the men who did these things hated those whom they thus tortured, but that does not make the effect or the deed any less terrible; indeed, there is something to be said for the view that if you hate your enemy you are at least treating him as a person, but that if you mutilate him in this way by the distant pressing of a button, you are not dealing with him as a fellow human being at all.

(3) Modern warfare also inevitably results in certain spiritual wounds, and in some ways these are even more fearful than the physical ones. Some of them are visited upon the enemy. Of the people who see in radioactivity merely a weapon with tremendous physical effects, Takashi Nagai, one of the people of Nagasaki, says: "Do they understand, have they investigated what it does to the heart and conscience and mind of those who survive? Do they have any knowledge of our society or spiritual bankrupts . . . ? We carry deep in our hearts, every one of us, stubborn unhealing wounds.

When we are alone we brood upon them, and when we see our neighbours we are again reminded of them—theirs as well as ours. It is this spiritual wreckage, which the visitor to Nagasaki's wastes does not see, that is indeed beyond repair."

Some of the spiritual wounds, however, are inflicted by the fighters upon themselves; for we cannot carry on a war to-day without committing innumerable deeds that we know to be evil and developing traits of personality that we desire to stamp out. As Christians we desire to cultivate in ourselves a feeling for the sacredness of human personality, but in war this feeling is numbed; we wish to learn consideration for the weak and helpless, but in order to bomb cities we have to blunt our compassions; we believe in meekness, gentleness and pity, but when we would fight we have to develop their opposites; we know we ought to seek goodwill towards men, but in a war the fires of hatred are fanned; we believe in the value of truth, but use lying propaganda to gain the support of friends, circulate falsehood to confuse enemies, practise deceit to mislead invaders, and for the sake of our country use treachery and dishonesty. It is not possible for a nation to engage in war without damage to its faith and morals.

(4) In modern warfare the means of attack are indiscriminate. When men fought by single combat, they killed those who were trying to kill them. To-day whole populations are wiped out, though they include not only people who are bent on destroying us, but those who if they could would save us, and those who have no knowledge of the matter at all. To-day war means the destruction of civilians and combatants, men and women, bad and good, the able-bodied and the old, the sick, the infirm, the young and the newly born. To ask a man if he would not shoot a Russian who threatened to murder his child is to imagine a situation that is not a true parallel to modern war; a real understanding of it would lead rather to the question: "Would you not go over to Russia and murder his child first?"

(5) Even more terrible is the fact that some of those who are indiscriminately killed, tortured or wounded, are fellow-members of the Body of Christ. John Hersey's book on Hiroshima tells of the destruction of one of the faithful centres of Christianity in Japan. That the Body of Christ should be pierced from without is fearful enough, but that the limbs should rise against each other, that one hand should cut off another, and that instead of building up the body the members of that body should themselves destroy it, is

surely blasphemy. That those whom Christ has joined together in one household and heavenly family, who have vowed themselves above every other allegiance to His service—that those should destroy one another, is almost incredible; and yet wherever nations which contain Christian people engage in warfare, that is what happens.

(6) Something should be said about the difference that has been made through the advent of radioactive weapons. These have not changed the essential nature of war, for war is still the destruction of human beings, and it does not seem to be any more wrong to kill and torture with one weapon than with another. Nor have they changed any of those other things which we have mentioned as being an inevitable part of modern war; for already before the advent of the hydrogen bomb, war involved torture, the loss of spiritual values, the use of weapons whose effects were indiscriminate, and the dividing of the Body of Christ.

Two things, however, these newest weapons have done. First, they have made the nature and effects of war more clearly visible; it is easier to-day than it was in 1939 to see what war is. Second, they have increased the scale of war and the extent of its effects. It is now possible for war to result in destruction so widespread and effects so far-reaching as to bring civilization as we know it to an end. War has always brought to society both material and spiritual sickness; it is now apparent that in another war this sickness might be unto death.

NO ONE GLORIFIES WAR

Both pacifists and non-pacifists hate it. Nor can any responsible Christian person be found to argue that its methods are in accord with the gospel of Christ; both pacifists and non-pacifists maintain that they are not.

Christ's teaching about our attitude toward enemies is that we are to love them*; but clearly it is not an attitude of love towards

* It has sometimes been argued that Jesus was speaking here about personal relationships and not national ones. That is not borne out by His language; for the word He uses for "enemy" is not that which means only "a man who is personally ill-disposed to someone" (*dusmenes*), and not that which means only "an enemy in battle" (*polemios*), but that which is susceptible of both these meanings, and in the Septuagint and the New Testament is actually used in both senses (*echthros*). Moreover, His saying must be interpreted with reference to the environment in which it was spoken—an environment of revolutionary nationalism in which armed resistance to the hated dominion of the foreigner was the burning question of the hour. It is not in the least likely, indeed we find it quite incredible, that when Jesus talked about enemies, He meant to exclude the particular enemies that were in every man's mind.

a man that we are expressing when we drop bombs on him; and we are no nearer to obeying the command of Christ if, instead of dropping the bombs on the man himself, we drop them on his father, mother, wife, and children. He taught also that we are to pray for our enemies; but as John Nelson once said: "I cannot go down on my knees and pray for a man, and then rise up and kill him when I have done." It has sometimes been said that the commands of Jesus are ideals to which we must ultimately come, but that they are not intended to be literally obeyed in a world which is as yet imperfect. That some of them (for example, the one about turning the other cheek) are startling examples of principles rather than of the particular ways in which those principles must always be put into action, is true enough. But Jesus did mean the principles to be put into action, and to say that we must postpone the loving of enemies until the world is so perfect that enemies no longer exist, is to make Him talk nonsense.

The deeds of Jesus are, if possible, even less ambiguous than His words. He refused to engage in the Messianic war, He commanded Peter not to defend Him with his sword; He refrained from calling the twelve legions of angels to His defence; He gave Himself into the hands of wicked men whom He knew would crucify Him, and when they did so He prayed for their forgiveness; He loved His enemies with such complete dedication that for their sakes He deliberately laid down His life. His deeds were also part of His teaching, and His followers are called not only to obey His words but to follow the pattern of His ways. This is true above all of His acceptance of the Cross. "For hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that ye should follow in His steps."

It would be easy to elaborate the argument that war is contrary to the teaching and way of Christ, but we believe that there is no need. War as we have described it will clearly not fit in with either the command or the example of Christ. There are one or two texts in the gospels which have been used in justification of war, but that can only be done by ignoring their context or arbitrarily twisting their meaning. There is in the gospels no ambiguity about the wrongness of the things war involves, and they leave us in no doubt that we are called to cultivate and express virtues which would make war impossible for us. The methods of war are contrary to the spirit and teaching of Christ. The Methodist Church along with others has declared that this is so; and we are all, pacifist and non-pacifist alike, convinced of it.

POSSIBLE OBJECTIONS

We are bound to recognize however that the practical conclusion to which the pacifist comes is contrary to the main line of the church's teaching, although we would not underestimate the significance of the minority view sustained from the beginning and indirectly supported in the catholic doctrine of the two orders. For this reason we take seriously the objection that our solution to the dilemma is too simple and we have tried to search our hearts lest we be mistaken.

1. It is sometimes argued that in spite of the fact that war is contrary to the spirit and teaching of Christ, there are some circumstances in which we should be willing to engage in it. Sometimes, it is said, we find ourselves in a situation where there is no good course of action open to us, and all we can do is choose between two courses of action both of which are evil; wrong as war is, it may be less wrong than the only possible alternative, and where that is so we must (however sorrowfully), choose it. We will comment on two situations where this may be thought to apply, and then state a general principle that concerns them all.

(a) Some say that it is less wrong to go to war than to allow innocent people to suffer. Scandalous though it may appear to be we recognize the awful fact that there are situations in this fallen world in which refusal to do evil patently involves innocent people in our suffering. This was the situation which confronted the martyrs. The worst part of their temptation was not the knowledge that if they stood firm they themselves would suffer, but the assurance that their loved ones would be involved too. Perpetua's father, who came to see her in prison, did not plead with her to spare herself, but to spare him, her mother, her aunt, her brothers and her baby "who cannot live without thee". "Do not," he said, "destroy us all." So it was with Phileas, Irenaeus of Sirmium, Dionysia of Alexandria, and many another, including John Nelson. As Origen said "It is the love of wife and children that fills up the measure of martyrdom". These men and women took a course which resulted in the innocent suffering of those they loved; but we all recognize that they were right to do so. They had to choose between denying Christ (often merely by burning a few grains of incense to Caesar) and involving their innocent (and often non-Christian) friends in their sufferings; but they knew that he who loved even father or mother or wife or child more than Christ was not worthy of Him. To allow others to suffer when, by doing something that is wrong,

one can prevent them from suffering is a torturing experience, but it is sometimes a part of the Christian life nevertheless.

(b) There are those who believe that if our nation acted as the Christian pacifists desired it to act, it would be overwhelmed by its enemies, and that even warfare is permissible for the sake of preventing consequences so dreadful. Our answer is twofold.

First, it is not by any means certain that this would be worse than the result of going to war. In a discussion of this kind it is always assumed that if there were a war we should win. Of course we might, but there is no means of knowing whether we should or not, and it is far from certain. If we did not, then we should be turned into a communist state in any case, and should suffer very much more than if we had not gone to war at all. If we did win, we know something of what it would cost. The first world war cost thirty-million lives and £80,000 million. In the last one a hundred thousand people were burned to death in Tokio in one night, and a quarter of a million were killed in one raid on Dresden. For the whole war the figures are 21 million young men killed in battle, 15 to 20 million women, children and old people killed in air raids, 29½ million wounded, mutilated or incapacitated for work, 21¼ million lost their homes through air raids, 45 million evacuated, deported or interned, 30 million homes reduced to ashes, 150 million people left without shelter, prey to famine and disease.* (Perhaps we ought to remember that these figures are not final, for as recently as June 1955 a fresh case of atomic disease was admitted into a Japanese hospital.) We have of course no means of measuring the cost in morals and religion, and in ill-will which may yet result in further open hostilities. Any future war would of course be worse than the last one, and its survivors reduced to the utmost misery and quite possibly to barbarism. It seems to us clear that merely from the point of view of expediency, it would be better to be overrun by a foreign power than to be involved in another full-scale war.

Secondly, precious though national independence is to us, we dare not elevate it to an absolute that qualifies our obedience to Christ. If we are pressed to a choice between Hiroshima or Belsen we must solemnly choose Belsen because though we should be suffering Belsen we should be actually causing Hiroshima. If it is alleged that the pacifist by refusing to resist the invader is an accessory to his tyranny, we reply that we believe spiritual resistance to

* Official figures from *International Review of Diplomatic and Political Science*. Geneva.

be an effective weapon in the hands of God and that uncomprising, suffering love is an earnest of the triumph of the Lamb that was slain.

With reference to this whole line of argument we would point out that all wars are commended to the people who fight them as wars to defend innocent people or to maintain national sovereignty. We do not recall that the church in this country, for example, has ever considered any war fought by Britain as other than a just one. In the great wars of our lifetime both sides have fought in the belief that they were ultimately defending their independence or supporting the weak. Nor indeed have people any way of deciding otherwise for the foreign office, assisted by our innate patriotism, makes sure that we give our own side the benefit of the doubt. The government, not the church and not the individual conscience, tells us when and how to fight. Moral arguments in defence of the just war seem to us a tortuous and sometimes sophisticated defence of the *status quo*.

2. A second major charge is that plausible though Christian pacifism is, it involves an irresponsible attitude to the State. Our answer is best given in an examination of Romans 13 where the Christian view of the State, and certainly the Protestant view, is most clearly set forth. We reach the following conclusions:—

(a) Government, in the mercy of God, stands between unredeemed man and chaos and thus demands the support of Christian man.

(b) Christians are called to challenge the government about its solemn responsibility under God to defend the innocent and restrain the guilty, lest the reverse become true and the renegade state become the monster of Rev. 13.

(c) This challenge will often, like the prophetic warnings of old, appear negative. The Church, whilst upholding *government* will be the sternest and most stubborn critic of *The Government*. This is where the church has previously signally failed in time of war and preparation for war. In the last resort she has always been submissive. At the beginning of the last war protestations were made against obliteration bombing. Eventually, on grounds of military necessity, they were tacitly withdrawn and, in this country, even Hiroshima and Nagasaki accepted by the official church without demur.

(d) Christians, being “in Christ”, representing the new divine order breaking in for the salvation of the world, cannot always be actively engaged in what an unredeemed state may deem necessary

for the maintenance of law and order. Even the Constantine settlement exempted the clergy and the monks, "the religious", from participation in war. Luther, recognizing the impossibility of a double standard in the church, taught that all Christians can accept lay vocations. Does not the priesthood of all believers however, rather suggest that all laymen should behave as priests? Surely, too, protestant churches that disarm the ministry disarm by implication the laity.

(e) The "sword" in Romans 13 is the lictors rods, the policeman's truncheon, not the national arsenal. To appeal to it to justify modern competitive national armaments is false exegesis.

(f) In fact, modern war, whatever may have been true in the past, does not maintain that order in which the church can win its widening way. It brings in its train injustice, cynicism, chaos and despair.

3. The third argument with which we are confronted is the assertion that the maintenance of armies and manufacture of armaments act as a deterrent against aggression and that the pacifist by refusing to support the constant renewal of armaments threatens peace rather than establishes it. Aggression, it is alleged, is only prevented by fear of the opponent's destructive potential. We readily admit that normally no nation will start war without reasonable chance of success, but we cannot forget two lessons of history:

(a) An arms race, by encouraging mutual fear and distrust has proved as likely to precipitate war as to prevent it. Was not this the lesson of 1914? To-day, when realignment of alliances or new scientific discoveries may suddenly and catastrophically alter relative strength, to keep peace by the balance of power seems to us a yet more precarious policy (compare Luke 11, 21-22).

(b) Modern states are not reasonable. St. Paul reminds us that "Principalities and Powers" still hold sway over unregenerate man. We have seen in recent years a great nation pulled down into ruins by forces which can only be described as demonically wicked. We have not sufficient confidence in the inherent reasonableness of unregenerate man to believe in the *Pax Atomica*—in the claim that the destructiveness of modern war acts as a deterrent. If Hitler was prepared for the whole world to share in his own nemesis, we see no reason to believe that other men, unscrupulous or at their wits' end, may not be equally reckless.

There is yet another reason why we cannot support a policy of supremacy in armaments as a contribution to peace. It is impossible

to make and test atomic weapons without the corruption of that democratic order of society which we are most anxious to defend. Even the preparation of modern scientific weapons involves the nations engaged in it in the kind of elaborate security measures which lead to mutual suspicion, persecution, espionage and counter-espionage, restriction of speech and writing as well as military and industrial conscription. All this poisons society and makes the redeeming and reconciling work of the church infinitely harder. So does the knowledge that our country is ready to be yet more ruthless and cruel than our adversary. There may conceivably be a way of preventing an outbreak of armed hostility by always being scientifically one step in front of the opposing power block, but can this situation be maintained unless both sides are *fundamentally alike*? There is a hint in the Temptation of our Lord that Satan can keep world order (Matt. 4, 8-9) but what kind of world order is it?

Our last objection to the so called *Pax Atomica* is more positive. We would mobilize our powers for a spiritual attack on tyranny.* We believe that wholehearted desire to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, heal the sick, house the homeless, befriend the prisoner and preach the love of God (Matt. 25, 31-46) will undermine the powers of evil and that Christians cannot at one and the same time be devoted to such a ministry and to the building up of war potential. In political terms this means the advocacy of the unfettered use of our scientific resources for the good of the poor peoples of the world. In personal terms it means that we pledge ourselves to a ministry of reconciliation which is not vitiated by an implied and extremely ugly threat of drastic reprisals if our attempts fail. Indeed, though we tremble to mention this, we might even, in the incredible Grace of God, be found worthy to suffer for the Name. This might well prove to be God's way to victory (Rom. 8. 17; II Tim. 2. 12).

IN CONCLUSION

We have considered these matters in some detail because we respect the objections of our Christian brethren to a course of action which seems to threaten their most cherished loyalties. Humbly we suggest that, at least in part, the offence which we give is the "skandalon" of the Cross. Some things, in the light of the Cross, seem to us unconditionally forbidden. The number of them is small, but most people would agree that they include the denying of Christ,

* c.f. *Programme for Peace*, by Edward Rogers. Epworth Press, 1/6.

murder and torture. It is difficult to see how we can avoid tacitly including war in the list for these things are an inevitable part of it. To destroy whole cities of people is surely murder; to use modern bombs inevitably means torture, and to commit deeds which are directly contrary to Christ's teaching and spirit, to nourish tempers of mind which He condemns, and to deal with wrong-doers in ways which diametrically contradict His own deliberately chosen method of the Cross, is to deny Him at least as decisively as the burning of incense to Caesar denied Him. Even if it could be shown that the consequences of pacifism would surpass in their horror all the consequences of war, indeed even if it could appear to be proved that war would establish God's rule on earth, or that by planting the thorns and thistles of radiocactive weapons we could make it possible for every man to sit under his own vine and fig tree, we should have to refuse to take part in it, for war involves us in deeds and attitudes that are unconditionally forbidden. In the fearful event of its outbreak we can only minister to its victims in any way permitted to us and thus witness to that other citizenship which the apostle called "in Heaven".

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